

Always Improving

Lessons from the samurai

By Steve M. Beauchamp

**Create Work:Life Harmony using the 8
virtues of the Bushidō code**

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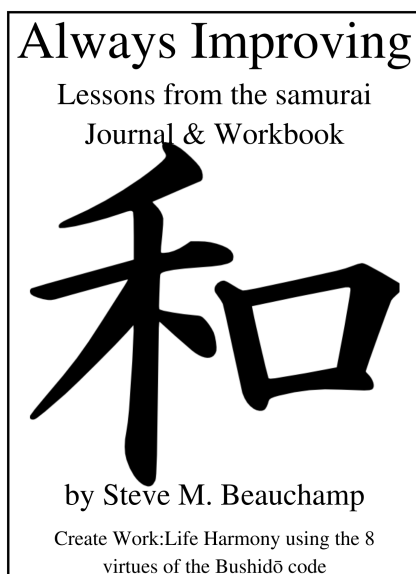
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*To my younger self and all of the other leaders out there
who want to find work:life harmony*

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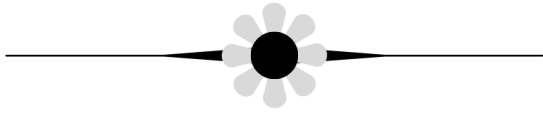
To get the best experience with this book, I've found readers who download and use the complimentary journal with the end of chapter worksheets are able to implement faster and take the next steps needed to achieve Work:Life Harmony



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Preface

Since 2006, I have been a leadership coach, project manager and quality professional for 3 major organizations in both the Corporate and Public sectors; Kraft Foods/Cadbury (now known as Mondelez), Starbucks Coffee & Tea Manufacturing, and King County Metro Transit. I have worked in 1:1 settings, in small groups, and large group settings. In this book I will present the invaluable learning situations that occurred throughout my career. In some instances, I will need to use a fictional name in order to protect an individual's privacy. This book will take you on a personal journey, and will open up a new perspective on how to lead yourself and others, using the principle of Work:Life Harmony.

I started my journey into the Continuous Improvement and Project Management world by becoming certified as a “Lean Practitioner” at Kraft Foods/Cadbury in 2006. Back then, Lean Practitioner training involved attending a series of 6 workshops that taught tools and principles with direct application into improving the flow of your personal work. A year later, after showing an

aptitude for making noticeable improvements in my own workflows, I was offered the opportunity to become certified as a Green Belt in Lean Six Sigma. At the time, I had no idea what that even meant. I already understood belts as they related to martial arts, but not in business. The American Society for Quality (ASQ), a respected organization in the Quality and Improvement Industry, uses this definition on their website:

“Lean Six Sigma is a fact-based, data-driven philosophy of improvement that values defect prevention over defect detection. It drives customer satisfaction and bottom-line results by reducing variation, waste, and cycle time, while promoting the use of work standardization and flow, thereby creating a competitive advantage. It applies anywhere variation and waste exist, and every employee should be involved.”

A Lean Six Sigma Green Belt has been trained to lead small projects, or be a team member in support of, or under the supervision of, a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt on more complex projects. Lean Six Sigma Black Belts are professionals who can explain the Six Sigma philosophies and principles, including the supporting systems and tools. Black belts have a thorough understanding of all aspects of the define, measure, analyze, improve and control model (DMAIC) in accordance with Lean Six Sigma principles. And he or she can demonstrate team

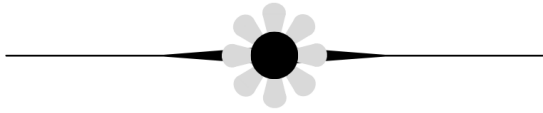
leadership and understand team dynamics. After my 3-month Green Belt training was complete, I had a better understanding of what was entailed in running projects, and making improvements to processes in a more systematic and documented manner. A job opportunity was presented to me, and I moved to the West Coast in 2011 to work for Starbucks Coffee & Tea Manufacturing. Shortly after arriving, I was asked to take on more complex projects. To do this, I knew I'd need to up my skills and knowledge, so I ended up getting my Lean Six Sigma Black Belt.

I held the title of Black Belt for 4 years while working on several projects at once. At one point, I was simultaneously managing 4 projects on a rotating basis at different stages of the project process. I was working extremely hard and for long hours, and although I was capable of doing it, I was reaching the point of burnout. During that time, I also went back to school to get my Project Management degree, and I was simply not taking adequate care of myself. It occurred to me that having major success at such a cost to my health was not the way to go. It was time to move on to a new organization, and I signed on with King County Metro Transit.

In 2014, after a year with KCMT, I decided that it was time to get my Certification as a Master Black

Belt. I was running larger and larger bodies of work that were spawning multiple projects from one large initiative. Effectively, I was running portfolios of work and training others to run smaller projects. A Master Black Belt certification is a significant milestone and a mark of career excellence. This certification is earned by individuals who have been a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, have demonstrated technical expertise & excellence, and have a thorough understanding of industry standards and practices. Master Black Belts demonstrate leadership ability, innovative thinking, and have a strong commitment to quality and improvement, as well as a strong teaching, coaching and mentoring mindset for Black & Green Belts.

In this role, I really felt the importance of taking care of my health and setting the example for younger Project Managers to do the same; and not have to work excessive hours to get the job done well. It became apparent that there was an underlying philosophy at work within me that has stood the test of time, many centuries in fact, and I knew I had a responsibility to share it with others.



Introduction

The primary audience for this book is Quality & Project Management professionals, but there will be many instances where other business roles will find the content applicable to them; i.e., Supervisors, Team Leaders Mid-Level Managers, Owners and CEOs. Over the years, I have found that professionals like myself end up being “firefighters”. That is, they have to put out the “flames” of bad business decisions made by others. They end up redoing other people’s work in addition to their own, leading to burnout: which is what happened to me. They often feel that they don’t have control over their time or their future; and don’t have a say in the overall strategy and direction of the organization. I will shed some light on how you can learn how to work and live with more harmony utilizing the thoughts and techniques that have served me well.

What I have learned from Japanese Culture

Self-care and good mental health are now a priority for me as a result of my study and appreciation of Japanese culture. Through the principles I have

learned and practiced, I have been able to attain: Work:Life Harmony. When I was 10 years old, I decided that I wanted to learn karate. Mostly, I wanted my older brother and his friends to stop picking on me. I was a small kid, and am not so much a huge adult either, at 5'6". My mom found a class I could take in our hometown of Thunder Bay, Ontario. It was there I built an appreciation for the venerable Japanese mindset and culture.

My sensei were passionate about their students learning the history of where our style of karate originated, and who the founder was. The style I studied was Isshin-Ryu, founded by Tatsuo Shimabuku in 1956, and is largely a synthesis of Shorin-ryū and Gojū-ryū, plus Okinawan kobudō. I learned how to count to 20 in Japanese, and began my study of the samurai, which created a curiosity about Bushidō. Little did I know at that time just how much that would mold and shape both my business and personal life.

The 8 Seconds That Changed My Life

In 2002, I worked for US Bank. On September 15th, around 3:00 pm, I was in my manager's office on a conference call. I can still remember that day like it was yesterday; the reason is a defining moment of 8 Seconds.

While I was sitting in the office, a man burst into the bank through the front door. He had a gun and was pointing it directly at the tellers. Our security guard drew his weapon, and yelled at the man to drop his. Then BANG! BANG! BANG! Three shots rang out in rapid succession.

When I heard the gunshots, I quickly jumped over the desk, and crouched underneath it with a female co-worker who was pregnant. I reached up, grabbed the phone off of the desk, and dialed 911. I wasn't even sure at this moment who had fired their weapon, or if anyone had been shot. In a matter of about a minute and a half, our entire parking lot was overrun with police cruisers, FBI vehicles, and an ambulance.

When we were given the "All clear" from the officers to come out from under the desk, it was only then that I found out the would-be robber was killed instantly by one of the rounds our security guard had fired. It turned out that several of us had immediately pushed their panic buttons at the gunman's appearance.

The entire incident from the moment the man opened the door to the moment that he lay on the floor dead was only 8 seconds. Those 8 seconds redefined my life in ways that I never even realized until I started to write this book. You see, after that incident, I could no longer work productively in a

bank. I could barely leave my apartment, much less get off the couch. At the time, my aspiration had been to have a career in the banking industry. But after those 8 seconds, I was no longer able to fully engage in the work. I found it very difficult to get dressed and go to work each day, and eventually I was fired.

What I realized much later in life, was those life-disrupting moments after the shooting were trying to tell me something. I felt that way because I didn't have the belief that I could control what was going on around me and in my life. After learning how to self-reflect over the years, I've come to realize a universal truth: We always have control over our future, and the decisions that we are making. No longer will I allow myself to end up in a position like I was at the bank after the shooting, because I now get to *choose* how I respond to all situations.

I don't know how many of you can say that you've lived through this type of a life-changing incident. But statistically speaking, we all have some sort of traumatic event that has defined us one way or another. In a roundabout way, I believe that terrible situations have a way of redirecting us onto the path that we were supposed to be on all along. For me, that was the Quality and Project Management field. Learning about Continuous Improvement, and how to help others use those

tools to enhance their processes has been a very rewarding career. I know now that I have a clear direction for what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm doing it right now and if the universe allows me to, I will continue to do it for some time to come.

What I have discovered is, you can learn how to integrate the Bushidō and Continuous Improvement principles to take control of your time and life direction. We all have the capability to shape the direction we want our lives to take, and the people who we want to serve in our professional pursuits. This has been my mindset and inspiration more recently on my journey. From studying martial arts to studying improvement arts, to becoming a certified Ikigai Tribe coach, I have made this realization: Ensuring that I am living my life first and foremost from my authentic self (my ikigai) is vital to my success.

Ikigai is a Japanese word that is actually made up of two different words. Ikiru: “to live”; and gai: “value or worth”. When you put the two words together you end up with “what makes life worth living”. And when you compare that meaning to the popularized Venn Diagram, they can seem quite different from each other. The Venn Diagram tends to direct you toward looking for a big goal or life ambition. Although that is important for every one of us to consider, that is not the only consideration

that matters. I have inserted a copy of the Venn Diagram that I created helping illustrate that this is not the way to find your ikigai.

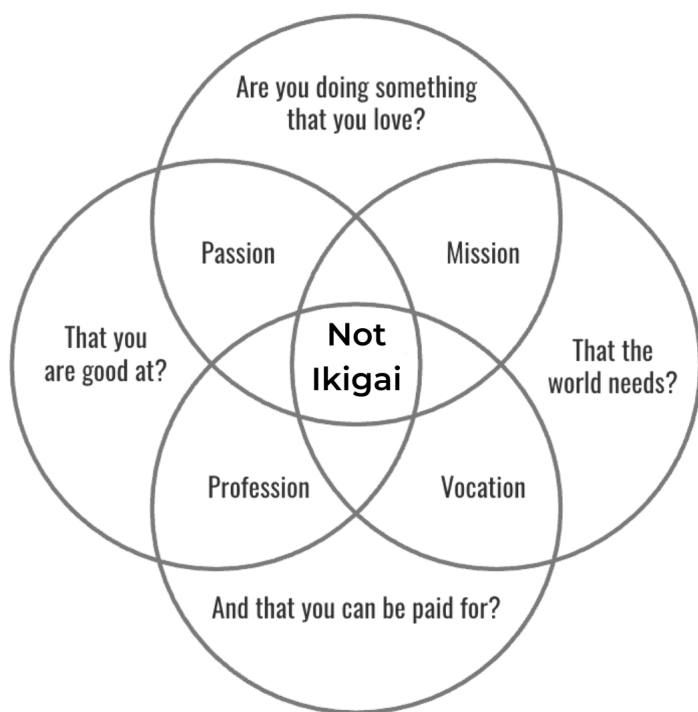


Fig o: Venn Diagram

This book is a window into the thought process that I have created for my life, and how I successfully coach and mentor others. I've realized that part of what I need to do is mentor others to be able to do the same thing that I was able to do. And that is taking ownership of our time and our

decisions so that we don't feel like we're out of control.

We've all felt challenged with control. It is one of the human needs that we all have; the need to feel like we have some control over our future. I'm here to tell you that you absolutely do have control over your future, it is just a matter of wanting to change. So, if you're feeling right now like you're out of control, more like a firefighter or a wild-goose chaser than a management professional, there's a question that I need to ask you:

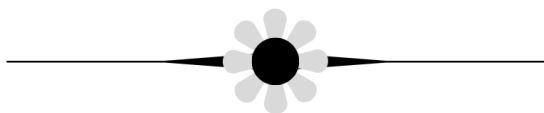
Do you honestly think that things are going to change if you keep doing things the same way?

To paraphrase Albert Einstein: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." It is likely you've quoted something like this to your clients or team at some point or another, but being able to make this true for yourself is something else entirely. This is something that you have to intentionally remind yourself of.

The big question that keeps coming back around for me is:

Am I living to work, or am I working to be able to truly live?

I am living proof that you can take the principles in this book, make changes to the way that you approach life, and be able to say yes to the latter part of that question. I've been doing it for many years. But it took me until now to be able to articulate the words that I'm able to share with you. After reading these pages, you'll be better able to connect with yourself, and discover parts of who you are that you didn't even know existed.



Chapter 1: The Importance of Work:Life Harmony

I've had a lot of different jobs over the years, and one of the things that has been on my mind in the recent past is, how to work so that I can truly live. For me, working cannot just be a means to an end. If it is, then it becomes fragmented from who I am. I much prefer to be able to say that the work I am doing is an extension of my whole self. Work:Life Harmony is the label I use to describe this. It is about fitting my work into my life rather than trying to fit my life into my work. Some people's lives are constructed so that they live to work. I've constructed my life to work so that I am able to truly live. To do this, my work absolutely needs to be an extension and expression of who I am, otherwise there is no path to experience inner harmony.

There is a Japanese proverb that states, "One who chases after two rabbits will not even catch one". I used to believe that you had to have two different lives that you were leading. One you'd lead while you were at work, and one you'd lead while

you were away from work. What I have found over the years is that trying to live this way will leave you feeling very disconnected. It doesn't give you what you truly want.

Eight years ago I found myself thinking about my life in a different manner. I explored the idea that perhaps rather than trying to balance these two lives, instead I could have one life that was in harmony with all of the parts. Since I began living this way and thinking about my life in this manner, I've developed Work:Life Harmony. I'm certainly not the one who coined this phrase, but it's an accurate description of how I like to move through the world.

Back in my 20s and 30s I used to work really long hours, like 55+ every week. This was neither sustainable, nor was it helping me feel like the life I was leading was one that I truly could be proud of. This was the problem: The work that I was doing was not at all connected to the life that I truly wanted to lead. It felt like I was trying to find this perfect balance between building my career and taking time away from work. But it wasn't working out well for me, and I was often left feeling like I was cheating either my professional or personal life.

What is Work:Life Harmony?

So let's talk about the definition of Work:Life Harmony. For me, this is about being able to lead *one* life. It's not about feeling like you have to have two completely disconnected lives that you trade between, and try to find the perfect balancing act. It's about allowing yourself to find a job and/or a role that feels very much a part of you. You don't feel like you are a different person when you're at work than you are when you're away from work. It allows you to find more peace in the activities that you're choosing to do. Whether the activities are ones that you get paid for, or don't get paid for, you find such a sense of peace from choosing to do those things, that it absolutely helps build more harmony in your life.

Definition of Wa 和

There is a word in the Japanese language for harmony: wa (和). This character appears on the front cover of the book. What I love about this word is that it also means peace and acceptance of what is happening around you. This is the type of composure that I am referring to when I say Work:Life Harmony. It simply means that the work I am choosing to do will be able to find peace with the life I am leading. There is no conflict between the two.

There is another word closely related to wa that I'd like to introduce as well: chōwa (調和), natural balance and harmony. In her book, *The Power of Chōwa*, Akemi Tanaka states: "Chōwa offers problem solving methods that help us to balance the opposing forces life so often throws at us: at home, at work, in our education, and in our personal relationships." For project managers and leaders, you could think of this as learning to accept the current state conditions you see in a process, the reality of the management's involvement, and the culture of the organization you work in.

In Figure 1.1, you will see what looks like an eight-petal flower. In the center are the kanji characters for chōwa. In Japan, a logo or crest was used to represent the different clans and daimyo. It is referred to as a kamon. The word kamon (家紋) is interpreted as family crest and was used to describe one's lineage, bloodline, status, and focus. It is an unspoken rule that you never use the kamon of another clan or family. It carries a sign of disrespect to do this. I have designed my own kamon as a symbol for Work:Life Harmony. Throughout the book you will see me add kanji to a petal for each Bushidō virtue at the beginning of each chapter. It will be completed at the end of the book, and is the Work:Life Harmony kamon. You can use this as a

reminder of the way to chōwa is through the 8 virtues.



Fig 1.1 Work:Life Harmony Kamon

How to live life with Work:Life Harmony

So, how do you strive to live with Work:Life Harmony? The first thing that comes to mind for me is the idea that you're able to live in flow. This allows you to feel like you're able to seamlessly transition from work to personal life and back again. No matter what activity you're choosing to do, you feel this sense of energy from the activities that you're doing. It makes you feel like you could just go on forever. You rarely have a feeling of being mentally exhausted, or just waiting for the weekend to arrive. As the late Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi,

Professor of Psychology and Management at Claremont Graduate University noted, “One of the most frequently mentioned dimensions of the flow experience is that, while it lasts, one is able to forget all the unpleasant aspects of life.”

Sure there are times where you will be mentally tired from pursuing anything; but that doesn't mean that you should be living in perpetual exhaustion. In an April 2020 article, by Imelda Wong, PhD, and Anna Arlinghaus, PhD they state that “Work experiences can be carried over from an individual to their home life and family members. Fatigue can affect mood and psychological well-being with negative consequences for the family.” In other words, if you think you are able to work in a job that has little to no flow without it having negative effects on your life, you are only fooling yourself.

There's this idea of acceptance that I strongly resonate with from the famous samurai Miyamoto Musashi in *The Dokkōdō*, namely Principle #1. He talks about the idea of accepting things for the way that they are, and not ignoring the things that are true. It's much easier for you to embrace acceptance when you are able to experience harmony. Because no matter what is happening around you, if you're able to accept it, enduring the unpleasant things becomes a little easier.

There's another interesting byproduct that you get from Work:Life Harmony. It helps you understand which things you should be saying yes to, and those you should be saying no to in your life. This is because when you experience Work:Life Harmony, it becomes quite obvious when you are doing things that aren't building more harmony for you. And when you get a good sense of the things that are building more harmony in your life, you will naturally gravitate to wanting to do more of them. This will also help you say no to the things that are taking away some of the harmony that you've built for yourself.

“Creating meaning involves bringing order to the contents of the mind by integrating one's actions into a unified flow experience.” - Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Action Step

Take the following Work:Life Harmony Assessment and see how you score. Each question has a yes/no answer.

1. When you think about your work and personal lives, you put a percentage on how much time you should spend on each. (yes/no)
2. Things keep on changing, which makes it feel like you are always out of balance. (yes/no)

The Importance of Work:Life Harmony

3. You have a feeling like you have to (or need to) do things perfectly. (yes/no)
4. Work and life tend to create feelings of being overwhelmed or overloaded. (yes/no)
5. You often feel the need to operate at 100% in everything you do. (yes/no)
6. It feels really difficult to consistently sustain working or living at 100% speed. (yes/no)
7. 24 hours in the day is rarely enough to complete everything you have to do. (yes/no)
8. You often feel you're stressed and want to feel more in control of your life. (yes/no)
9. When things don't go according to plan, you blame yourself and tend to be harsh and critical. (yes/no)
10. Multi-tasking is common for you, and you often put others first while ignoring your own needs. (yes/no)

How did you score? The Yes's are each 1 point, and the No's are 0 points. Add all them up and see how you scored.

If you scored 5-10 you likely experience a lot of constant stress, and could cope better with new strategies to help you feel more at peace. Don't worry, what you are about to read throughout this book will help you with that.

If you scored 0-4 you likely experience stress, and are coping well, but you are always looking for new strategies and opportunities to feel more at peace.

Whatever your score was, I can assure that you will find within these pages many valuable ideas on how to live with more harmony by applying the virtues of the Bushidō code. But before we get to that, let's learn a little more about the samurai history and culture. In order to move forward effectively, I have found it helpful to reflect backwards and learn from those who have gone before us.

About the Author

Steve Beauchamp is a Certified Ikigai Tribe coach, a lover of nature, an aspiring mountain guide, and a Continuous Improvement mentor & practitioner holding both a Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt and a degree in Project Management. His private coaching practice aims to teach and coach the concepts of building Work:Life Harmony through Japanese wisdom & philosophy. By building that harmony, he has helped his clients remove barriers to their success and achieve a transformation they didn't know was possible.



Thank you for reading my book

I appreciate your feedback, and I love hearing comments about my writing. I invite you to share your thoughts and input to make the next version of this book and my future books better.

Please leave a helpful review on Amazon letting me and other readers know what you thought of the book.

Thank you so much,
Steve M. Beauchamp